





as filthy as his own. "In service of the Queen, is it then? Jack the lad, you lucky boy you." Clinically polite, her hands did their job, while her wicked little smile invited him to share her humour. She nodded down at Bodie's exposed body and winked, saying, "Definitely a lucky man, aren't you?"

"It's not like that," blushing to hear him stutter, the rising red and the stumbling words convincing her that he was lying.

"You don't have to pretend, not to me. I've got a cousin who's the same. I've spent years, absolute years," she whispered confidently, "trying to persuade him to let me have a gander at the sort of thing he gets up to, but he's too bloody shy by half. The great tragedy of my life, that is."

He looked at her askance, at the perfect prettiness of her, at her delicate bones and flawless skin, at her wide green eyes, canted like his own, her whole face alive with prurient and carnal curiosity. "You don't mean what I think you mean, do you?"

"Oh, now, and that would depend on what you were thinking I was meaning, wouldn't it?" Then she laughed again, that same filthy chuckle, and Doyle knew that she really did mean what he had been shocked to think she meant. Not the kind of thing you expect to come from the mouth of a tiny doll of a woman, especially one who fitted the image of a nun or a mother.

"You, eh," he grinned at her, the implications of such honesty hitting him like a ton of bricks and putting him into automatic chat-up overdrive, "like that kind of thing, do you?"

"Like it? Holy Mary, I've got books and books on it, and every last one of them from the Continent." The laugh again, and Doyle couldn't help but chuckle in sympathy with that infectious sound. "Hear, you'll never believe what this lot," a toss of her head to indicate the hospital, "and my family think about all my little trips across the water to Holland and France and all those sorts of place."

"Go on, tell me. What *do* your family and all this lot think about all your little trips?" he whispered in his best music-hall joke-telling voice.

"They think I'm off on retreats and holy

visits!"

He laughed out loud at that, shushing himself almost as quickly as her hand clamped over his mouth. "SHHH!" she hissed, glancing quickly over her shoulder to make sure the door was still shut and then looking at her patient to make sure he was still out like the proverbial light. "Honest, it's the God's honest truth. It was the only excuse I could come up with to explain what a decent young girl would be doing going over to the Continent."

From what she had said, it was obvious that she was Catholic, and Doyle had more than a passing acquaintance with what some Catholic mothers and brothers thought of young, *unmarried* girls going off on their own to the sinful Continent. "How'd you manage to get them to let you travel on your own and not with one of the tour groups?"

"Oh, that's easy," she said, with a smile that was easier still. "I left them all behind in Antrim!" Bodie moved, again, the barest glimmer of motion, again, the left foot.

All thought of chatting her up evaporated, and Doyle was bent over Bodie, face very close, whispering his name, trying to make his partner wake up.

Nothing.

Across the bed, he heard a heavy sigh and looked up, startled, because he had forgotten there was anyone else there.

"What a lovely sight the two of you are. So much in love, it's a joy to see. I'm only sorry that it's him in that bed so ill that's been the needing to let me see this."

He didn't hear the last of it, stubbing his mental toe over something and stumbling. "In love?" he said, voice up an octave or two. "In love? Me and Bodie? That's a bloody stupid thing to say."

"It's all right, you don't have to get all defensive with me—?"

Ingrained habit of years had him supplying his name to fill the unvoiced blank. "Doyle. Ray Doyle."

"Well now, Ray, there's no need for you to be so upset, not with me. You can be honest, when it's just the two of us in here. An' your...partner won't mind, will he?"

He was as breathless as if he were under a million fathoms of water, chest compressed,

























